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**Subject:** EPA treating toxic water from abandoned Colorado mine after accident

# E.P.A. Treating Toxic Water From Abandoned Colorado Mine After Accident

By JULIE TURKEWITZ AUG. 11, 2015

Inside

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Colorado's governor, John W. Hickenlooper, left, examined a fish trapped on the banks of the Animas River in Durango, Colo., on Tuesday. Credit Shaun Stanley/The Durango Herald, via Associated Press

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DENVER — Nearly a week after the [Environmental Protection Agency accidentally breached a store of chemical-laced water](#) from an abandoned mine in southwest Colorado, toxic water continues to spill at a rate of 500 to 700 gallons a minute, [E.P.A.](#) officials said Tuesday.

The agency is treating the toxic water as it pours out, said David Ostrander, a regional emergency response director for the E.P.A.

Colorado, New Mexico and the Navajo Nation have declared states of emergency. And the Colorado governor, John W. Hickenlooper, visited the contaminated river on Tuesday, speaking to residents in Durango who have been barred from using the Animas River because of the spill.

“We take this as a catalyst,” Mr. Hickenlooper said, adding that there are thousands of abandoned mines in the West. “I think our goal here is to really focus on what we can do to make

sure that those mines where we know we have a serious problem — how can we accelerate the remediation and make sure that something like this never happens again?”

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## Colorado Governor Visits Polluted River

Governor John Hickenlooper of Colorado announced that the Animas River is beginning to improve after an accidental spill of toxic wastewater by Environmental Protection Agency workers.

By REUTERS on Publish Date August 11, 2015. Photo by Jerry McBride/The Durango Herald, via Associated Press. [Watch in Times Video »](#)

Gina McCarthy, the administrator of the E.P.A., apologized for the accident at an energy forum in Washington. “I am absolutely, deeply sorry that this ever happened,” Ms. McCarthy said, according to The Associated Press.

On Aug. 5, a team contracted by the E.P.A. was investigating the Gold King Mine, an abandoned gold mine near Silverton, Colo., that had been leaking toxic water at varied rates for years. The goal was to figure out how to stop that leak. Instead, while using a backhoe, workers knocked away debris and unleashed an onslaught of orange-yellow water.

The toxic plume flowed into the Animas River and traveled south. On Tuesday, officials estimated it had reached Kirtland, N.M., more than 100 miles from the mine.

The spill caused levels of arsenic, lead and other metals to spike in the Animas River. Mr. Ostrander said Tuesday that in Durango, a city about 50 miles south of the mine, the river’s toxicity had returned to “pretty much a pre-incident level.”

Officials have closed the Animas and one of its tributaries, the San Juan River, for drinking, irrigation, fishing, rafting and other activities at least through Monday, affecting communities in southwest Colorado, northern New Mexico and the Navajo Nation.

At least seven public water systems that typically take water from these rivers and pump it into their water sources have stopped doing so. On the Navajo Nation, officials are hauling water to Montezuma Creek, Utah, and Halchita, Utah, two communities of a few hundred people that typically receive water from the San Juan, said Deenise Becenti, a spokeswoman for the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority.

Households near the rivers that use wells are also at risk of contamination, officials have said. The E.P.A. continues to test water along the plume’s path. The agency has not said whether the spill presents a health risk to humans and animals.

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"Out of the long list of nature's gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil."  
Hugh Hammond Bennett